

Mediation to help solve lease dispute

Rent | **Kate Bruce-Rosser**

PRAHRAN Mechanics' Institute did not change the locks on Swinburne University last Saturday after agreeing to mediation over its leasing dispute.

But the long-standing stoush involving the State Government could still wind up in court if the August 14 session fails.

Earlier this year the *Stonnington Leader* reported the institute had served a notice to quit on the Government, threatening to evict Swinburne from two buildings at 140 High St on August 1 unless certain terms were met.

The 155-year-old non-profit institute has legal advice that the Government breached a lease by subletting to the university "without the consent of the landlord".

Swinburne has not paid rent since it occupied the institute's buildings in 1992.

However, the Government's legal

advice is that the lease remains valid.

In a public notice, institute president Alfred Lazer wrote that he was "happy to advise" the parties had agreed to formal mediation.

Christine Worthington, the institute's librarian for nearly 10 years, said she had met the Government and/or Swinburne at least a dozen times to resolve the matter.

Next week's meeting will be the first time an independent arbiter has been called in.

"We believe formal mediation is necessary in order to establish whether the matter needs to go to court," Ms Worthington said.

"We hope that won't be necessary, and we are going into the mediation in good faith."

Skills and Workforce Participation Minister Jacinta Allan is not attending the mediation but will send a representative.

► **Readers back the Institute - Opinion p14.**